

IMAGE PROCESSING APPARATUS AND METHOD

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

5 The invention relates to image processing apparatus and method. For example, the invention relates to image processing apparatus and method for efficiently controlling an image input apparatus such as a scanner or the like and an image output apparatus such as a printer or the like. More particularly, the invention relates to image processing apparatus which has a coding (compressing) function of image data and inputs and outputs an image and to a method for realizing such an apparatus.

15 Related Background Art

 Hitherto, an image processing apparatus called hybrid equipment such as copying apparatus or facsimile constructed by an image input apparatus such as a scanner or the like and an image output apparatus such as a printer or the like or a computer system having a copying apparatus and a facsimile as sole apparatuses has been put into practical use. In such an apparatus, it is necessary to efficiently process a very large amount of data in order to handle image data.

25 For this purpose, there is also an image processing apparatus for coding input image data by both software which is executed by using a CPU and

coding/decoding (compressing/decompressing) hardware
(CODEC: Coder-Decoder). In such conventional image
processing apparatuses, however, since an image data
storing area, the CODEC, and the CPU are connected to
5 the same bus, a transfer ability of the bus becomes a
bottleneck upon coding (compression) of the image data.

To solve the above problem, there is also a system
such that a transfer ability is enhanced by using two
buses. Even in the system having a plurality of buses,
10 however, a construction of the bus is not flexible and
in the case where a large amount of data is transferred
or the like, the transfer ability is not sufficiently
utilized.

15 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention is made to solve the above problems
and it is an object of the invention to provide image
processing apparatus and method, in which by using
switching control means which can flexibly change a
20 construction of a bus, image data can be simultaneously
coded (compressed) by both a CPU and a CODEC.

To accomplish the above object, according to the
present invention, there is provided an image
processing apparatus comprising: a first bus which is
25 connected to coding/decoding means of image data; a
second bus which is connected to an image memory and
used for transferring the image data; a third bus

connected to a CPU for executing a coding process of
the image data in accordance with a predetermined
program; and switching control means for arbitrating
connecting requests from the CPU and the
5 coding/decoding means to the image memory and switching
the connections of the buses, thereby enabling the
image data to be coded by using the first bus during
transfer of the image data using the second bus in
accordance with a control by the CPU through the third
10 bus.

The above and other objects and features of the
present invention will become apparent from the
following detailed description and the appended claims
with reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing a whole
construction of an image processing apparatus according
to an embodiment of the invention;

Fig. 2 is a cross sectional view of the image
processing apparatus according to the embodiment;

Fig. 3 is a functional block diagram of a control
unit for use in the image processing apparatus
according to the embodiment;

Fig. 4 is a block diagram of a main controller for
use in the image processing apparatus according to the
embodiment;

Fig. 5 is a block diagram of a system bus bridge for use in the image processing apparatus according to the embodiment; and

Fig. 6 is a block diagram of a scanner/printer for use in the image processing apparatus according to the embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

An embodiment according to the invention will now be described in detail hereinbelow with reference to the drawings.

Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing a whole construction of an embodiment of an image processing apparatus (image input/output (I/O) system having an image input apparatus and an image output apparatus) according to the invention.

In an image I/O system 100 in Fig. 1, a reader (image input apparatus) 200 optically reads an image of an original and converts into image data. The reader 200 comprises: a scanner 210 having a function for reading the original; and a document feeder 250 having a function for feeding an original paper.

A printer (image output apparatus) 300 conveys a recording paper, prints a visible image according to the image data onto the recording paper, and delivers the paper to the outside of the apparatus. The printer 300 comprises: a paper feeder 310 having a plurality of

kinds of recording paper cassettes (not shown); a
marker 320 having a function for transferring the image
according to the image data onto the recording paper
and fixing it; and a paper deliverer 330 having a
5 function for sorting and stapling the recording papers
on which the images have been fixed and outputting them
to the outside of the apparatus.

A control unit 110 is electrically connected to
the reader 200 and printer 300 and further connected to
10 host computers (PCs) 910 and 920 through a network 800
such as LAN (Local Area Network) or the like.

The control unit 110 controls the reader 200,
reads the image data of the original, controls the
printer 300, outputs the image data onto the recording
15 paper, and provides a copying function. The control
unit 110 also provides: a scanner function for
converting the image data read out by the scanner 210
into code data and transmitting the code data to the
host computers 910 and 920 through the network 800; and
20 a printer function for converting the code data
received from the host computers 910 and 920 through
the network 800 into image data and allowing the
printer 300 to output the image.

An operation unit 150 connected to the control
25 unit 110 is constructed by a liquid crystal touch panel
and provides a user I/F (interface) for operating the
image I/O system.

Fig. 2 is a cross sectional view of an image processing apparatus according to the embodiment having the reader 200 and printer 300.

The document feeder 250 of the reader 200
5 sequentially feeds the originals one by one from the head onto a platen glass 211. After completion of the reading operation of the original, the document feeder 250 delivers the originals on the platen glass 211. When the original is conveyed onto the platen glass
10 211, a lamp 212 is lit on, the movement of an optical unit 213 is started, and the original is exposure scanned. Reflection light from the original in this instance is led to a CCD image sensor (hereinafter, referred to as CCD) 218 by mirrors 214, 215, and 216
15 and a lens 217.

The image of the original scanned as mentioned above is read by the CCD 218. The image data outputted from the CCD 218 is subjected to predetermined processes and, thereafter, transferred to the control
20 unit 110.

A laser driver 321 of the printer 300 drives a laser emitter 322 and allows the laser emitter 322 to emit a laser beam according to the image data outputted from the control unit 110. The laser beam is
25 irradiated onto a photosensitive drum 323. A latent image according to the laser beam is formed on the photosensitive drum 323. A developing agent is adhered

to the portion of the latent image on the
photosensitive drum 323 by a developer 324.

5 The recording paper is fed out from one of
cassettes 311 and 312 at a timing synchronized with the
start of the irradiation of the laser beam and conveyed
to a transfer unit 325 and the developing agent adhered
onto the photosensitive drum 323 is transferred to the
recording paper. The recording paper on which the
developing agent has been adhered is conveyed to a
10 fixing unit 326. The developing agent is fixed onto
the recording paper by heat and pressure of the fixing
unit 326. The recording paper which passed through the
fixing unit 326 is delivered by delivery rollers 327.
The paper deliverer 330 binds the delivered recording
15 papers, sorts them, and staples the sorted recording
papers.

When a both-side recording mode has been set,
after the recording paper is conveyed to the delivery
rollers 327, the rotating direction of the delivery
20 rollers 327 is reversed and the paper is led to a
refeed conveying path 329 by a flapper 328. The
recording paper led to the refeed conveying path 329 is
fed to the transfer unit 325 at the foregoing timing.

<Control unit>

25 Functions of the control unit 110 will now be
described with reference to a block diagram shown in
Fig. 3.

A main controller 111 mainly comprises: a CPU 112;
a bus controller 113; various I/F controller circuits
(not shown but will be explained hereinlater); a coder-
decoder (CODEC) (not shown but will be explained
5 hereinlater); and the like.

The CPU 112 and bus controller 113 control the
whole operation of the control unit 110. The CPU 112
operates on the basis of a program read out from an ROM
114 via an ROM I/F 115. The CPU 112 interprets PDL
10 (page description language) code data received from the
host computers 910 and 920. The operation for
developing the image data into raster image data has
been described in the PDL program. The CPU 112
executes an image data developing process by software.
15 The bus controller 113 controls a transfer of data
which is inputted and outputted to/from each I/F and
performs an arbitration upon competition of the buses
and a control of the DMA data transfer.

A DRAM 116 comprising a synchronous DRAM is
20 connected to the main controller 111 by a DRAM I/F 117
and used as a work area for allowing the CPU 112 to
operate and an image accumulating area for accumulating
the image data.

A network controller 121 is connected to the main
25 controller 111 by an I/F 123 and connected to an
external network by a connector 122. The Ethernet can
be generally used as a network.

An expansion connector 124 for connecting an expansion board and an I/O controller 126 are connected to a general high speed bus 125. Generally, a PCI bus can be mentioned as a general high speed bus 125.

5 A serial controller 127 of two channels is equipped for the I/O controller 126. The serial controller is connected to external I/F circuits 140 and 145 by an I/O bus 128, thereby enabling control commands to be transmitted and received to/from CPUs of
10 the reader 200 and printer 300.

 A panel I/F 132 is connected to an LCD controller 131 and constructed by: an I/F for displaying on a liquid crystal display unit on the operation unit 150; and a key input I/F 130 for inputting by hard keys or
15 touch panel keys.

 The operation unit 150 comprises: the liquid crystal display unit (not shown); a touch panel input apparatus (not shown) adhered onto the liquid crystal display unit; and a plurality of hard keys or a
20 keyboard (not shown). A signal inputted from the touch panel input apparatus or hard keys is sent to the CPU 112 through the panel I/F 132 mentioned above, thereby allowing the image data sent from the panel I/F 132 to be displayed on the liquid crystal display unit.

25 Functions in the operation of the image forming apparatus, the image data, and the like are displayed on the liquid crystal display unit.

A real time clock module 133 is used for updating and storing a date and a time which are managed in the equipment and backed up by a backup battery 134.

5 An E-IDE interface 161 is used for connecting an external storing device. A hard disk drive or a CD-ROM drive is connected through the E-IDE interface 161 and a program and image data can be written or read out.

10 A connector 142 is connected to the reader 200 and constructed by a serial I/F 143 and a video I/F 144. A connector 147 is connected to the printer 300 and constructed by a serial I/F 148 and a video I/F 149.

15 The scanner I/F 140 is connected to the reader 200 through the connector 142 and connected to the main controller 111 by a scanner bus 141. The scanner I/F 140 has a function for performing an optimum binarization and a zooming process in the main scanning and sub-scanning directions to the image received from the reader 200 in accordance with processing contents in the subsequent steps. The scanner I/F 140 further
20 has a function for outputting a control signal formed on the basis of a video control signal sent from the reader 200 to the scanner bus (video I/F (reader)) 141.

The data transfer from the scanner bus 141 to the DRAM 116 is controlled by the bus controller 113.

25 The printer I/F 145 is connected to the printer 300 through the connector 147 and connected to the main controller 111 by a printer bus (video I/F (printer))

146. The printer I/F 145 has a function for performing a smoothing process to the image data outputted from the main controller 111 and outputting the processed data to the printer 300. Further, the printer I/F 145
5 also has a function for outputting a control signal formed on the basis of a video control signal sent from the printer 300 to the printer bus 146.

The raster image data developed in the DRAM 116 through the scanner bus 141 in accordance with the
10 image read by the scanner 210 is controlled by the bus controller 113 and transferred to the printer 300. That is, the raster image data is DMA transferred to the printer 300 via the printer bus 146, printer I/F 145, and video I/F 149.

15 <Main controller>

Fig. 4 is a block diagram showing an internal construction of the main controller 111.

The CPU core (CPU) 112 is connected to a system bus bridge (SBB) 402 through a processor bus (SC bus) 421 of 64 bits. The system bus bridge 402 is
20 constructed by a 64-bit crossbar switch of (4 × 4) and connected to a local bus (MC bus) 422, a G bus 404 as a graphic bus, and a B bus 405 as an I/O bus besides the SC bus 421. The MC bus 422 is a dedicated bus with a
25 memory (SDRAM & ROM) controller (MC) 403. The memory controller 403 has a cache memory and controls the DRAM 116 and ROM 114.

The system bus bridge (SBB) 402 is designed so that the simultaneous parallel connection among the four modules can be assured as much as possible. If a connecting request corresponding to the channels over
5 the number of channels which can be connected in parallel is issued from each module connected to the SBB 402, an arbitration control is executed on the basis of a predetermined priority order. The system bus bridge (SBB) 402 is also connected to a coder-
10 decoder (CODEC) 418 of the data through a CODEC bus 423.

The G bus 404 is cooperatively controlled by a G bus arbiter (GBA) 406 and connected to a scanner/printer controller (SPC) 408 for connecting to
15 the reader 200 and printer 300. The B bus 405 is cooperatively controlled by a B bus arbiter (BBA) 407. The B bus 405 is connected to not only the SPC 408 but also a power management unit (PMU) 409, an interrupt controller (IC) 410, and the foregoing various (I/F)s
20 controllers, respectively.

That is, the B bus 405 is also connected to a serial I/F controller (UARTSIC) 411 using a UART, a USB controller (USBC) 412, a parallel I/F controller (IEEE1284 (PIC), i.e., IEEE1284 controller) 413, an LAN
25 controller (LANC) 414 using the Ethernet, an LCD panel, keys, a general I/O controller (panel controller) 415, and a PCI I/F (PCIC) 416, respectively.

The operation unit 150 having the foregoing liquid crystal display unit, keyboard, and the like is connected to the PC 415.

<Interrupt controller>

5 The interrupt controller 410 is connected to the B bus 405, collects interrupts from each functional block in a main controller chip and from the outside of the chip, and distributes them again to a 6-level external interrupt which is supported by the CPU core 112 and a
10 non-maskable interrupt (NMI). The functional blocks include the PMU 409, UARTSIC 411, USBC 412, IEEE1284 controller (PIC) 413, LANC 414, panel controller 415, a PCI bus interface (PCIC) 416, scanner/printer controller 408, and the like.

15 <Memory controller>

 The memory controller 403 is connected to the MC bus 422 as a dedicated local bus for the memory controller and controls the synchronous DRAM (DRAMA 116), the ROM 114, and a flash ROM.

20 <System bus bridge>

 The system bus bridge (SBB) 402 is a multichannel bidirectional bus bridge and provides a mutual connection between the B bus (I/O bus) 405, G bus (graphic bus) 404, SC bus (processor bus) 421, and MC
25 bus (local bus) 422 by using a crossbar switch. The connections of two systems can be simultaneously established by the crossbar switch. A data decoding

processing time can be reduced by performing a high speed data transfer with high parallel performance using software and hardware.

Fig. 5 is a constructional diagram showing the system bus bridge (SBB) in detail.

The system bus bridge (SBB) 402 has: a B bus I/F 2009 for connecting to the B bus 405; a G bus I/F 2006 for connecting to the G bus 404; a CPU I/F slave port 2002 for connecting to the CPU core 112; a memory I/F master board 2001 for connecting to the memory controller 403; and a CODEC bus I/F 2014 for connecting to the CODEC 418. The system bus bridge (SBB) 402 also has: an address switch 2003 for connecting an address bus; a data switch 2004 for connecting a data bus; and a cache invalidator 2005 for invalidating a cache memory in the CPU core 112.

<PCI bus interface>

Returning to Fig. 4, the PCI I/F 416 is a block for interfacing the B bus 405 as a general I/O bus in the main controller 111 and the PCI bus 125 as an I/O bus outside of the chip.

<G bus arbiter, B bus arbiter>

Arbitration of the G bus arbiter 406 is based on a center arbitration system and the arbiter 406 has a dedicated request signal and a ground signal for each bus master. The G bus arbiter 406 can program a control method. Two modes can be selectively

designated as a method of giving priority to the bus masters. One of the modes is an equitable arbitration mode in which the same priority is given to all of the bus masters and a bus right is fairly given. The other
5 is a priority arbitration mode in which priority of one of the bus masters is set to be high, thereby enabling such a bus master to preferentially use the bus.

The B bus arbiter 407 accepts a bus using request of the B bus 405 as a general I/O bus. After
10 completion of the arbitration, the B bus arbiter 407 gives a bus using permission to the one selected bus master, thereby inhibiting simultaneous bus accesses by two or more bus masters. The arbitration system of the B bus arbiter 407 provides priority of three stages and
15 a plurality of bus masters are programmably allocated to each priority.

<Scanner/printer controller>

The scanner/printer controller 408 connected to the reader 200 and printer 300 by the video I/F 141 and
20 146 makes an interface between the G bus 404 and B bus 405 in the controller. As shown in Fig. 6, the scanner/printer controller 408 is mainly constructed by: three blocks, that is, a scanner controller (SCC) 4302, a printer controller (PRC) 4303, and a G bus/B
25 bus I/F units (GB I/F) 4304 and 4305; and a CP bus 4306.

The scanner controller (SCC) 4302 is connected to the reader 200 by the video I/F and controls the

operation and data transfer. The scanner controller 4302 is connected to the G bus/B bus I/F unit (GB I/F) 4304 by the I/F bus and performs the data transfer and the reading/writing operations of a register.

5 The printer controller (PRC) 4303 is connected to the printer 300 by the video I/F and controls the operation and data transfer. The printer controller 4303 is connected to the G bus/B bus I/F unit (GB I/F) 4305 by the I/F bus and performs the data transfer and
10 the reading/writing operations of a register.

 The G bus/B bus I/F units (GB I/F) 4304 and 4305 are units for connecting the scanner controller 4302 and printer controller 4303 to the G bus 404 or B bus 405. Both units are independently connected to the
15 scanner controller 4302 and printer controller 4303, respectively, and connected to both G bus 404 and B bus 405.

 The CP bus 4306 is a bus for directly connecting the image data of the reader 200 and printer 300 and
20 sync signals for horizontal and vertical synchronization.

<Power management of main controller>

 Returning to Fig. 4, the main controller 111 is constructed by a large scale ASIC having a CPU therein.
25 Therefore, if all internal logics simultaneously operate, the main controller 111 generates a large amount of heat and there is a fear that the chip itself

is broken. To prevent it, the main controller 111 performs a power management of every block and, further, monitors an amount of electric power consumption of the whole chip.

5 The power management is individually performed in each block. Information of the amount of electric power consumption of each block is collected as a power management level to the power management unit 409. The power management unit 409 sums the amount of electric
10 power consumption of each block and monitors the amount of electric power consumption of each block in the main controller 111 in a lump, thereby preventing the total electric power amount from exceeding a limit electric power consumption.

15 Subsequently, the copying operation by the image I/O system 100 according to the embodiment with the above construction will be described.

 In the reader 200, when the scanner 210 starts to read the image, the scanner 210 generates a vertical
20 sync signal (VSYNC), horizontal sync signal (HSYNC), and a video clock to the scanner controller (SCC) 4302. The image data is outputted from the scanner 210 synchronously with those timing signals. The scanner controller 4302 fetches the image data synchronously
25 with each of the timing signals. The fetched image data passes through the G bus 404 and MC bus 422 and is DMA transferred to the memory controller 403 by GBI_SCC

of the GB I/F 4304. The memory controller 403 writes the DMA transferred image data into the DRAM 116 through the memory bus 117.

5 The image data written in the DRAM 116 is coded by the CODEC 418 and, thereafter, passes through the CODEC bus 423 and memory bus 117 and written into the DRAM 116 again. To the CODEC 418, the CPU core 112 instructs an amount of transfer image to be coded which has previously been calculated from the image data
10 amount.

The previously instructed image data in the image data written in the DRAM 116 is coded by the CODEC 418. The remaining image data is coded by the CPU core 112 and, thereafter, written in the DRAM 116 again.

15 Although the image data coding by the CODEC 418 and the image data coding by the CPU core 112 can be executed in parallel, at this time, a deterioration of the bus transfer ability due to the bus switching is not caused owing to the operation of the system bus
20 bridge 402.

When an amount of coded image data written in the DRAM 116 reaches an amount by which a difference of the image data transfer speeds of the scanner 210 and printer 300 can be buffered, the image data transfer
25 from the DRAM 116 to the printer 300 via the memory bus 117, MC bus 422, and G bus 404 is started. The amount of coded image data can be discriminated by various

methods such as discrimination by the data transfer time from the scanner 210, discrimination by an address which is written in the DRAM 116, discrimination of the DMA transfer amount in the GBI_SCC, and the like.

5 The image data transfer to the printer 300 is performed under control of the printer controller (PRC) 4303.

10 The printer controller 4303 decodes the coded image data written in the DRAM 116 by the DMA transfer of GBI_PRC of the GB I/F 4305 by a well-known decoding system and, thereafter, sequentially stores it into an internal FIFO (not shown). The decoding system can be realized by any of the CODEC 418 as hardware, software which is executed by the CPU core 112, or parallel
15 processes of both of them.

20 The printer controller 4303 simultaneously generates the vertical sync signal (VSYNC) to the printer 300. After that, the horizontal sync signal (HSYNC) and video clock are inputted from the printer 300 to the printer controller 4303. The printer controller 4303 outputs the image data stored in the internal FIFO to the printer 300 synchronously with the inputted HSYNC and video clock. In accordance with a flow of the image data as mentioned above, the copying
25 operation for outputting the image corresponding to the image data obtained by the reading by the scanner 210 from the printer 300 is executed.

A flow of the image data in the copying operation according to the embodiment is as follows. The reader 200 → the scanner controller (SCC) 4302 → the GB I/F 4304 (GBI_SCC) of the reader 200 → the memory

5 controller (MC) 403 → the DRAM 116 → the CODEC 418 (CPU core 112 in the case where the copying operation is performed by software) → the DRAM 116 → the memory controller (MC) 403 → the GB I/F 4305 (GBI_PRC) of the printer → the printer controller (PRC) → the printer
10 300.

According to the image processing apparatus and method of the invention as described above, by arbitrating the first connecting request to the image memory from the coding/decoding means of the image data
15 and the second connecting request to the image memory from the CPU for executing the coding process of the image data in accordance with a predetermined program and switching the connection of the buses, the image data coding operations are simultaneously executed in
20 parallel in both of the CPU and the coding/decoding means, so that the image data can be coded at a high speed. That is, there is an effect such that the coding time of the image data can be reduced.